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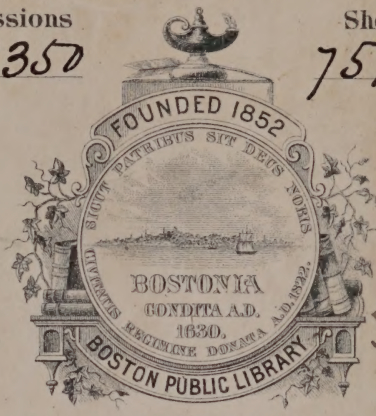

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WAR AND CHRISTIANITY:

AN ADDRESS

BEFORE THE

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AMERICAN PEACE SOCIETY,

ON THE

FOURTEENTH ANNIVERSARY

IN BOSTON, MASS., MAY 23, 1842,

BY SAMUEL E. COUES.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE SOCIETY.

If men be subjects of Christ's law, they can never go to war with each other.
BISHOP TAYLOR.

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June 13, 1865

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WAR AND CHRISTIANITY.

The American Peace Society assumes as its position, that international war is opposed to the spirit of Christ, is forbidden by the Gospel, and that it can never be waged without a violation of the commands of the Prince of Peace. We are separated from the world so far as this, the fundamental article of our association, will separate us. Whatever may be the opinions of individuals among us, we do not, as a Society, concern ourselves with the question of the right of private or personal self-defence, nor do we advocate any change of the penal code. We are not opposed to the government of the country, nor in any way do we place ourselves in an attitude of defiance to constituted authorities. But we hold fast to our rights and duties as Christians; we profess a paramount allegiance to God; we believe that no act of our rulers, that no posture of this nation, or of any other nation, can repeal the law which demands of us love to our enemies, so as to justify us in taking the property and lives of the people of other lands. We do therefore no more or less than place ourselves on the "Thus saith the Lord."

We believe that this is a high and holy position, and we have come up to it, not in a moment of fitful enthusiasm, but calmly, resolutely, from the deliberate convictions of our minds. We are aware of all the consequences of this position. We have surveyed the whole ground. We know the strength of prejudice which bears against us. We are prepared to meet the tide of popular opinion. We are not dismayed when many, high in church and state, look coldly upon us. It is not our numbers which gives us this confidence, though the friends of Peace are increasing all over the world; nor our talents, though many of the greatest minds of the age are with us. Our success will be because we are right, because we are co-workers with God in the redemption of the world, because we are collected under the banner of the cross, because God hath said that the time shall come when the nations shall learn war no more for ever; because "it is finished," said Jesus, when he gave up his life for his enemies. And angels and archangels shall re-echo the cry, "it is finished," when men shall so partake of the spirit of Christ, as to be willing to die for those who hate and persecute them; and not until then will our Lord's kingdom come, and the reign of righteousness be established over the whole earth!

I am addressing a Christian audience. Have you not chosen the Prince of Peace for your leader? Does he authorize you to fight, or to give your countenance to the fight? Will he hold you justified in destroying, for your own good, or for your country's good, the stranger of another land? There should be no strangers, nor foreigners, nor aliens to the Christian. It matters not under what government a man is born, or where he dwells; he is our brother; he is under the same roof—the canopy of the sky; he is a member of the one household of God which takes in the whole world. The church of Christ is also the church universal; it recognizes

no national line as a partition wall; it takes to its bosom the Christian of every country and every clime; it embraces all who worship the true God through Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world. Ye are indeed brethren, the children of one Father. The Christian warrior, then, if a Christian can be a warrior, fights with a brother, with one subject to the same laws, under the same government as he himself is. He can sit at the Lord's table, eat of the bread, emblem of his body broken for him, drink of the wine, emblem of the blood shed for the remission of sin, enjoy sweet communion with his brother; then, before the taste of the consecrated elements has passed away, drive the steel into his brother's heart, and immediately visit the widow and the fatherless, lifting up the hands of the murderer in prayer for her whose husband he has slain, or lay them, yet reeking with a father's blood, upon the orphan's head!

Such it is in effect, for a Christian to fight; as such must it appear to the eye of God. We separate the anthem of praise from the shout of victory; the prayer, Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us, from the noise of the battle; the worship of the Prince of Peace, and the garments rolled in blood, strike not our minds at once. Yet to our Father in heaven, to whom time and distance are nothing, who seeth the end from the beginning, before whom the whole life is spread out, these things are blended together.

War is either right or it is wrong. It is either permitted or forbidden. It may be waged "with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our minds, with all our strength," or it must be abandoned by the Christian. There is no middle ground, no half-way position. Either the blessing of God can rest on the battle-field, or we must come up to the rescue of our faith from this pollution of blood. There is, we repeat it, no half-way vindication of national war: it is to be

baptized of Christianity, adopted of her, it accords with her character, or it must be opposed by every one bearing the name of Christ.

Let us examine some of the objections which have been urged against our position.

It has been said often, and we continue to hear it, even from the lips of the Christian, that the position of this Society is too high, that though the principles we profess are unquestionably the Christian principles, they are too pure for adoption, surrounded as we are by the selfish and the contentious. Wait, it is said, for the millennium! Your faith is fitted for beings of a higher order than men; it accords better with the purity of the angels of heaven. What an admission for our encouragement is there in this very objection! Advocate of Peace, be of good cheer! It is much for you that your position is thus holy. Let the doctrine of a self-sacrificing love to man be wrought into your heart; it will be health to your soul; and though no ear may listen when you speak of that which gives you sympathy with Heaven itself, it will lift you up, it will cause you to breathe an atmosphere purified of the corruptions of a fighting world.

Our Saviour did not bend the standard of duty so as to meet with the notions of worldly expediency. The measure of duty—the Christian code of morals—is held up, fixed, unyielding, determinate, that it may convict the world of sin. The bread of life is not adulterated so that it may suit the taste of a perverse generation. Remember the words of Jesus, "It hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you. Your Father maketh the sun to rise upon the evil and upon the good. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."

Is this more fitted for earth, than our almost needless commentary on these blessed words, when we say that it is opposed to the spirit of Christ, for Christians to rend and destroy one another in the waging of international war?

The position of this Society is further assailed upon this ground. The government of the country is a Christian institution; it is a minister of good; it is a terror to evil doers; it preserves the rights of the people, their property, and their lives. We should respect "the powers that be," and as the prop and support of government is the sword, Christians are justified in using the sword. If the Peace principles were to prevail, if no Christian would fight, government, an institution consecrated by Christianity, would be weakened, if not altogether overthrown. We state this objection as it came from the lips of a minister of the Gospel, in a sermon defensive of war.

If we are to uphold our government right or wrong, if we are to give it our sanction, alike when its operation is for good, and when it outrages the principles of Christianity, we undermine the very foundation of morals, and overthrow the partition wall between the right and the wrong. It would be the bringing of the Gospel into trial by courts of law, or by the cabinet councils, or rather it would be the making of human tribunals to stand in the place of revealed truth.

Say, for instance, the revenue derived from the importation and distillation of alcohol is needed for the support of "the powers that be;" let, then, no one advocate the disuse of that which intoxicates, or speak one word for temperance, for, traitor-like, he would weaken the government of his country! Again; slavery makes a part of our present social compact; the chain which binds the African is supposed to be, and actually is, the bond which keeps together the north and the south; the "peculiar institution" gives form, and expression, and character, at home and abroad, to our political institu-

tions. Let no man remember the slave as bound with him; let no lip utter aught of human brotherhood, lest we weaken this minister of good, this terror to evil doers!

A foreign military officer, high in rank, while travelling through a part of New England, observed that "this country could not be strong in war. The people were too much educated, they were too independent, too happy, to be made soldiers of." Poverty to the borders of starvation is the most successful recruiting officer. Christian, do not attempt to stem the tide of intemperance, do not contend against those vices which impoverish and degrade the people, do not strive to make your countrymen happy and prosperous, virtuous and intelligent, lest you spoil them for soldiers. Do not seek to make them religious, for as Wellington observed, "a man of keen religious sense has no business in the ranks of the army." Dissolve your associations for reform: disband the companies of Christian philanthropists that now are gathering together for mutual sympathy and aid. They are unpatriotic, all of them; like the American Peace Society, they have for their object the dissemination of principles which will weaken the military strength of the country. Would you close your Bible altogether, if it weakened your country in war? As you answer this question, so will you answer these objections to the principles of peace.

If our government be a Christian institution, how can we better manifest our respect for it, than by filling our hearts with the spirit of Christ? There are no incompatible duties enjoined by the Gospel. To make ourselves temples for the Holy Ghost, and to give a hearty support to Christian institutions, is no separate and conflicting work. This government is a Christian institution so far as it guards the property, the lives, the rights of the people. But the character of our government rests on the character of the people. By elevating them, by purifying their morals, by leading them to

a higher standard, you do, in fact, yield the most efficient support to a Christian government. If, therefore, you would uphold it, spread over the land the pure principles of Christianity, whether or not they seem to weaken the powers that be. We must not try our principles by their direct action on government, but by their action on the character of the people. For on this character the preservation of every good institution, the permanence of every social compact, the rights of every individual, ultimately rest.

Besides this, it is, to say the least, very inconclusive reasoning to demand for our government, because it is a Christian institution, military strength to enable it to contend with other governments, equally Christian institutions,—to draw from the necessity of law, order, and justice among ourselves, a right to establish the rule of brute force over the world,—a rule which repeals all law, and measures the rights of man by his ability to maintain them with the sword. How absurd to draw from the necessity of law to regulate the intercourse of the citizens of any country, the conclusion, that Christianity should abandon her post, as the lawgiver of the world, withdraw her sanctions, repeal her statutes, so that the nations may be justified in mutual slaughter, whenever it may please their rulers to embark in the desolations of war.

The next objection to the principles of our Society is but a branch of the preceding one. Self-defence is a Christian right, and we are not only allowed to defend ourselves, but it is a Christian duty to defend others. As a nation, we are bound together for this mutual defence. We depend upon others for our safety, others depend upon us; nor can we give or receive this protection but by the sword.

The sword, the very instrument of destruction, the protection of a nation! A sure protection indeed, when the pointing it towards others invariably brings its point to our

own bosom! The sword the only arbiter of justice! A righteous judge indeed, for it is used equally by both contending parties! The sword our only sure defence against the selfish and violent, when the selfish and violent wield it with equal strength with ourselves! Do we not forget, too, that the sword should be taken from our hands for this very reason—the safety of others; that we should be disarmed that others may live in peace. It is no more safe in our hands than in the hands of other nations. We wield it with no more wisdom than they. We are not one whit less selfish —less belligerent than they. The very legislators who are to decide the question of its use, cannot assemble without brawls, and fightings, and bloodshed, in the very capitol.

Will you say that it is the fear of war which restrains the nations from mutual injury,—that if other nations did not dread our declaration of war, they would encroach upon us, injure our country, and despoil the land,—that we are safe only as our enemies dread our attack?—that it is the sword in the scabbard ready for use which gives our nation its safety?—that the threatening attitude, the preparation for war in peace is our national shield? Why, it is the sword in the scabbard, it is the threatening attitude, the preparation for conflict, which creates the danger. This reliance on the sword is the evil against which we contend. In proportion to this reliance, is the danger. Nations confronting each other with their armaments are never safe. The veriest accidents tend to embroil them in war. Those nations which have been most prepared for war, have invariably suffered the most from war, verifying the words of our Saviour, "they that take the sword shall perish by the sword."

Some years since, in one of our Southern States, the practice of carrying concealed weapons became common among the people. No one supposed he was safe unless he had about

him, the pistol or the bowie-knife—the instruments of death to others, and of defence and safety to himself. The result was, continual bloodshed. No man's life was safe. Murder became so prevalent as to excite the attention of the legislature. They passed a law, punishing him who carried these weapons on his person. The legislature thus took away the means of defence—as they were termed—and the effusion of blood was stopped.

It is so with the nations. There has been continual warfare. The world has never been at peace. Christianity, the lawgiver of the world, would open the path to Peace and safety by the disarming of the nations. She would stop the effusion of blood by throwing away the sword. But, alas! men have not confidence in her teachings. They fear to obey her laws. They cling to the instruments of death as the means of safety, and they have dearly paid the penalty of disobedience.

What has the sword done for us as a nation? What for our freedom? For very many years, say one-seventh of the time, we have groaned under the harsh despotism of war—the very worst of despotisms. One-sixth of our whole population are abject slaves; nor have Americans emancipated themselves from the fear of the sword, from faction and riot, from turbulence and popular commotion. They have never risen up to the liberty of the children of God.

What has the sword done for the protection of property in this nation? We have squandered in war more than eight hundred millions of dollars. Add to this the loss of the productive labor of the fighting men, the idleness and waste of time, the captured property, the breaking up of commerce, and it sounds like irony to speak of the preservation of property by the very process which of itself annihilates the greater part of the nation's property, and destroys the morals and industry on which only can national wealth be founded.

What has the sword done for the preservation of life to this nation? Estimate the number of the slain in the Indian wars, in the French war, in the war of the Revolution, in the last war with England,—bring to mind the number of those who perished on the sea and on the land, upon our lakes and our rivers, on our northern frontier, and on our southern boundary, on the long Atlantic coast, in the western wilderness, in the heart of the country, and all over its broad surface;—add to these, the victims of the prison-ships, and of the hospitals,—those who died from hunger and cold, from hardship and exposure, from wounds and mutilations, from the vices and pollutions of the camp. Bring all these corpses together before the mind, as if the countless multitude lay on some vast plain; look steadfastly for a moment on this sea of the dead; survey this mass of mutilated, of crushed, of trampled bodies—the results of your national wars—and then speak to me, if you can, of the protection of life by the sword!

But, look! there is another sea of the dead—another multitude of witnesses, countless as the leaves of the forest, which speak against us—the collected corpses of those whom Americans have slain. Each of these, too, was a man, a brother, a child of God, whose very hairs were numbered. And though they have all passed away for ever from the earth, though their names are forgotten, each one now liveth and standeth before God, as a witness of the desolation and ruin, of the torture and misery, which arise from the abandonment of the principles of the Prince of Peace. But further; what is the life of the body, compared with the life of the soul? What is the pain of a violent death, compared with the agony of unrepented sin? Each one of these murdered millions stands before the judgment seat! Is the army the school of Christ? Do men's souls go up to heaven pure and undefiled, from the

pollutions of the camp? Are they taught to love God whom they have not seen, while engaged in destroying their brethren whom they have seen? Can they join harmoniously in the praise of God as redeemed spirits, who have left their bodies linked together on earth in the death-grapple?

And can all this have been without a load of crime, fastening not indeed on the soldier,—the mere instrument of war, often as little accountable as the sword he uses,—but resting somewhere—on some souls? We cannot trace out the guilty ones. God can, and to him the blood of our murdered brethren cries out from the ground! O, there is a vast weight of guilt, attaching somewhere, for this horrid butchery! Let us each see to it that for the time to come we clear our skirts of our brother's blood. Let him beware, who justifies murder, whenever it is said over the death-struggle, "it is for the country's good."

Defence of our country—of our friends—of our families—of our brethren! Truly, this is a Christian duty; and we call upon all to discharge this duty by opposing the spirit of war,—by spreading the peaceful doctrines of Him who spake as never man spake. That men may lead quiet and peaceful lives in their happy homes, are we associated together in the cause of Peace. It is for this that we would disarm the nations, that we would imbue men once again with their natural repugnance to the shedding of blood, which the war spirit has overcome. It is for this we would re-create in the hearts of men a reverence for life, the gift of God, which the frequent battle has destroyed. It is for this—the general safety, that we ask men to lay down their arms, strip themselves of the gaudy trappings of the soldier, give up their proud, boastful, self-confident bearing, clothe themselves in the garb of humility, assume the child-like, heavenly frame of mind, speaking in the kindness of the eye, lighting up the

countenance with the smile of benevolence, causing the words of kindness to flow from the lips. Then war no more shall desolate the earth, for there will be faith in Jesus. The sun of righteousness, shining upon the world's true interest, shall form the bow of promise across the arch of heaven, as the sign of the safety of the nations, and of the peace of the world. The world in peace! an object worthy of God manifested in the flesh!

But,—we repeat the idea,—that which is destructive to life, is not the preserver of life; that which is the instrument of the slavery and degradation of the people all over the world, is not the instrument of freedom and happiness. But even if we are wrong, even if life would not be altogether safe from the abandonment of the sword, if our principles expose the nations to loss, let the loss come. If blood must flow as the price of safety to others, let it flow,—but as it flowed from the side of Jesus, willingly, for the good of the world! The martyr spirit is more Christian-like than the heroic; if, therefore, blood must be shed, let it not be that of hireling soldiers, ready to die for their pay and their rations, but from the Christian, whose glorious privilege it is to sacrifice himself in defence of the principles of the Gospel. Away with the sword from our hands, if its use accords not with these principles. Shall armies of hundreds of thousands be found ready to peril their lives for their country, and their pay, and shall the Christian blench and tremble at a less danger, which may arise from adherence to his faith?

The question—after all these objections—comes back to this. What do the Christian Scriptures teach on the subject of war? All considerations arising from our duty to government, to our own selves, to other men, are merged in this. Revealed truth is the only standard for the Christian. Whatever is clearly commanded must be done; the consequences

may safely be left to God. He knoweth best what is for our ultimate good. Our reason is bounded to a narrow horizon; He seeth at one view the chart of the eternal interests of all his children on the earth.

But before we enter upon the examination of the teaching of the Christian Scriptures in relation to war, it may be well to glance for a moment, at the opinions expressed by the heathen world, before the advent of Christ. "We punish," says Seneca, "murders and massacres among private persons, what do we respecting wars, and the glorious crime of murdering whole nations? . . . . Barbarities are authorized by decrees of the senate, and votes of the people; and enormities forbidden in private persons are ordered and sanctioned by public legislatures." "Blood and religion," says Dr. Edwards, "will not cement together; even the heathen know this, they therefore labored to purge themselves of that pollution, before they betook themselves to religious exercises." Homer puts these words into the mouth of one of his characters, "It is by no means fit for a man stained with blood and gore to pray to the gods." So Virgil, "Do you, my father, officiate in the sacred rites, and pay the devotion due our country's gods; for, as for me, just come from the war, and reeking with fresh slaughter, it would be criminal in me to touch them, till I shall have washed the pollution in the running stream." Hear another distinguished ancient, "For, if the slaughter of enemies be at all lawful, yet whoever kills a man, though in self-defence, though forced to it, yet seems to be guilty of blood, on account of the common relation which we have through the medium of the gods above to all men." Shall Christians turn to the ancient heathen for the discovery of a more merciful, and peaceful, and innocent faith than is found in their Scriptures? Yet, in their churches sounds the loud Te Deum, for a fresh victory

won over the enemy; the Christian soldier rushes from the carnage of the fight to the altars of the Prince of Peace; still worse than this—the church of Christ sends her priests as chaplains into the very field of blood!

One word in relation to the wars of the Jews. There are many, who, finding no vindication for fighting in the Gospel, gladly turn back to the Old Testament for an excuse for war. The acute prelate, Bishop Taylor, says, with regard to these wars, "these are certainly not to be imitated. Nothing is to be imitated but what is good, and in these there was nothing good but the obedience. Whatever appears to us as wrong requires before we adventure upon it, an express, indubitable command." But we are not left, even in the Old Testament, without the express rebuke of God upon the trade of the warrior—upon blood-guiltiness. We are not without the most emphatic denunciation of war, even of those wars of which it is said that God himself went out with the Jews against their enemies. "And David said unto Solomon, my son, as for me, it was in my mind to build a house unto the name of the Lord my God. But the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly and hast made great wars; thou hast shed blood upon the earth in my sight; thou shalt not build a house to my name, because thou art a man of blood."

Yet, the Christian has supposed that it is permitted to him to blend together the service of God and the destruction of his fellow-men;—that he can be a "man of blood," yet in his own heart set up the spiritual temple, fit for the indwelling of the Holy Ghost.

To return to the direct examination of the teachings of the Christian Scriptures in relation to war: There are certain passages, three in number, which have been often employed in the vindication of war. The first is, John said unto the

the soldier, "be content with thy wages," and adds, "do violence to no man;" next the passage in Romans, to which we have already alluded, commanding respect to the powers that be. The third and last, the words of our Saviour, "He that hath no sword let him sell his garment and buy one," adding after, "He that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword." These are all.

Special pleading may be necessary to the understanding of a code of human laws; imperfect and often contradictory as of necessity it must be, it is well to compare part with part, section with section, to subject the whole to a close, technical, verbal scrutiny. Far otherwise is the law of Christ. There is a oneness of character in the Gospel. Revealed truth is a harmonious whole; at the first view, its character is as distinctly impressed upon the mind, as the pure, the heavenly, the spiritual, was reflected from the countenance of the Lamb of God. The soul and spirit of the Gospel is love,—love which no sectional feeling can subdue, no national boundary can limit, which no circumstance or situation can overcome. Love, even to enemies, is the distinguishing feature of our faith. Its birth-cry was of "Peace on earth;" it never ceased to speak of forgiveness, of meekness, of long-suffering, of humility, of seeking others' good and not our own, of returning good for evil. Draw you permission to war from this blessed Gospel, when the very cap-stone and finish of this spiritual temple was the yielding up the life of Jesus for his enemies?

In the study, and in the work-shop, about the place of business, and among the scenes where innocent amusement is sought, write the words of our Saviour, that they may meet the eye plainly and distinctly; they will be to thee a guide and a direction; place upon the walls of the house, over the family hearth, his holy words, and in thy social enjoyments

they shall be to thee sweet counsel; at the festive board, at the marriage feast, in the chamber of death, in the house of mourning,—every where, where duty may call, thou wilt find appropriate the teachings of the Gospel. But write not on the martial banner, engrave not on the cannon, affix not on the warrior's tent his peaceful words—a blessing upon the meek, upon the poor in spirit, upon those who are injured and persecuted, upon the pure in heart, the merciful, the peace-maker! It would be blasphemy, it would be a mockery of the words of the Prince of Peace. If the very letter of the Gospel thus frowns upon the trade of blood, can its inner spirit be in harmony with the deeds of war? No! no! War can never be justified by the teachings of Christ. Our position is the true position. It cannot be gainsayed.

The practice of Christians in times past is no proof that war accords with the spirit of Christ. That great men, nay, otherwise good men, have fought, we are willing to admit. Christianity is progressive in its demands. It indeed calls for the discharge of every known duty, but the circle of duty enlarges as the mind becomes enlightened, as the heart becomes purified. It is true that the sun of righteousness arose at once in its full strength, obscured by no cloud, dimmed by no mists; yet the eye unaccustomed to its brightness, dazzled by its intensity, sees not at once distinctly all that it shines upon. Even one of the immediate followers of our Saviour, whose eye had rested upon his benignant countenance, whose ear had drank in the melody of his voice, would have called down fire from heaven to consume his Master's enemies. He knew not, said Jesus, "what spirit he was of." And so of the Christian warrior, who, conscience free, has destroyed the enemy he was called upon to love; he has mistaken his duty, is ignorant of the true character of Christianity. We would not condemn such, but that which they ignorantly have done is no example for our imitation.

The stream, as it flows through the earth, becomes stained and turbid; it is pure and limpid only at the fountain-head. The rays of divine truth are distorted and discolored as they pass through the denser medium, the human mind. We should look heavenward, if we would not be deceived. Search the Scriptures. Precedent,—the practice of professing Christians,—is no test of duty; it cannot be depended upon as a proof of the right. By it you would draw the white robe of Christianity over all the errors, crimes, and corruptions of Christendom. The banner of the cross has been unfurled over the pirate and the slave-ship; it has waved upon the walls of the inquisition, while, stretched upon the rack, the wretched "heretic" was writhing in agony, or at the stake, his flesh, while yet alive, was consuming of fire, slowly and lingeringly, the sufferer praying for the death that seems to mock him and will not come. It has been displayed in encouragement of those engaged in the butchery of women and children; it has floated, heavily, blood-soaken, over rapine and violence all over the earth. So that the name of Jesus has become a by-word and reproach to the infidel and heathen. O, bring not the deeds of professing Christians as your defence of war; for this justification by precedent would prove so much that every sentence of the Sermon on the Mount must needs be clean blotted from the Gospel page.

On what, at last, then, does the advocate of national war rest his vindication of it? On the assumption, that the doctrines of the peaceful Jesus are not fitted for this world? Who is to judge of this, God or man? In the necessity of the case? Does this supposed necessity set aside the law of God, and does it permit you and all men to exercise your own fallible judgments, when and where and for what you shall deceive, and rob, and murder your brethren of other lands? Christian, did it never occur to your mind, that if a human

law might be broken whenever he that broke it thought it for his good, then there could be no wholesome restraint whatever? And equally, if this nation or any other can fight for good to itself, can act in opposition to the letter and spirit of the Gospel, whenever it may be deemed expedient to the rulers—then there is no supreme moral law, no rule to govern the intercourse of nations, to regulate the relations of men to each other,—then all is loose in morals, all is left to the fallible judgment of men,—then we may do what we list, commit any evil whatever from which we suppose good may come.

To the necessity of the case—for the safety of the nation, for the preservation of the people, are the advocates of war driven as their last and only ground for its defence. It is a great evil they acknowledge, but they are willing to encounter it to prevent a greater evil; they would injure others only to benefit themselves, they would butcher others only to prevent being butchered by them. Life must be made secure by armed resistance to the enemy; for protection of life only will they fight!

It has been estimated,* and the estimate is low so as to be within the truth, that fourteen thousand millions of men, have on this earth been slaughtered in war—eighteen times the number of the present inhabitants of the globe! A large part of this slaughter since the advent of Christ, and there has been a greater carnage among professed Christians than among other people. The last century has been distinguished for its share in this butchery. Protection of life by the sword! Reflect upon this for a moment! The inhabitants of eighteen worlds slaughtered in war; fourteen thousand millions of beings placed upon the earth to be fitted for heaven, and yet all these are mangled, cut to pieces, mutilated and destroyed by those who are partakers of the same nature! And yet, when

* Philosophy of Religion, by Thomas Dick, LL. D.

we plead for peace on earth, when we beg of Christians to come up with us, that this plague may, in some degree, be stayed, then to hear from their lips of the danger to the life of men from the abandonment of the sword!

But, if, on the ground of safety to life, we were equal only,—if there were no reliance to be placed on the promise, that "when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him,"—if experience had not proved that the unarmed man, in the midst of the most ferocious savages, is more safe than the warrior clad in steel, —if history did not point to the nations the most feeble in war, to colonies and states without any military defence, standing secure in peace for centuries, while the battle raged continually among the nations strongest in war,—if, on the ground of safety, we be equal only, then can you hesitate whom you will serve, the God of peace, or the demon of war?

We know where the difficulty is,—we have traced out the secret of the opposition, or rather of the apathy, of the Christian world to this movement for Peace. There are few open advocates of war; no one pretends that it is in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel; no one justifies its deeds; few among Christians who do not pray to be delivered from it.

The trouble is here. Let me speak for those who look coldly upon this movement. If we teach that this nation should disarm, that the martial spirit should be crushed,—if we teach that all war offensive and defensive is opposed to the spirit of Christ,—then we ourselves must be fully imbued with the spirit of peace, individually. It must bring with it a radical change of character. We are not prepared for this. The path which opens before us is a long path; pleasant and beautiful as it appears, hallowed as it is by the foot-prints of Jesus, we are not prepared to walk in it. We know not where it leads; we see not the end of the journey. The fear of radicalism, of ultraism, of non-resistance, technically so

called, is one of the chief difficulties against which the Peace Society has to contend.

To avoid this objection we would reduce our standard, if we could do so without an entire abandonment of this holy cause. Could we find firm footing on some lower ground, we would willingly descend. We would divide war into necessary war and unnecessary war, into war of offence and defence, if we could make the division so distinct, so palpable, so obvious, that there could be no mistake made; so that men when they fought, should always fight in the mild and merciful spirit of Christianity,—so that the blessing of the Prince of Peace might rest upon the slaughter. But we cannot define this species of warfare,—we cannot make this distinction. We know this only, that in every war both of the contending nations shelter themselves under this plea of self-defence.

We would, therefore, say to those who will not walk in the path which we have chosen, because they fear it leads to ultra ground, to radicalism, to non-resistance,—that there is a worse danger in the path they are now walking in so fearlessly. You will not go with us, because we are so radical as to contend against all war. This is the separating point. You would use the sword, but only and strictly for national defence. The emergency in which the use of it would be necessary may occur. You should be prepared for it. An army is needed; a navy is to be built; forts, arsenals, military schools to be provided, and some military spirit kept alive among the people. The time, however, when self-defence demands the war, is to be judged of by some tribunal. It cannot be left to you, or to others individually. Your government must decide this, and you must fight whenever, by mistakes in diplomacy, by the ambition of your rulers, by the contests of a factious party spirit, by a mob on the frontier, by the claims of the slave-holder, a war is deemed necessary by the power over you. You commence by admitting the oc-

casional necessity of national war; you wisely make the needed preparation, and then are compelled to leave the occasion for it to be decided by others. You are just where others are; you decide to make yourselves a party to any war; to change yourself from an accountable being to a mere instrument of violence and death to others, whenever it may please those in authority. Verily, to avoid one extreme, you rush to the other. To escape non-resistance to physical force, non-resistance so far as your body is concerned, you have become a non-resistant to moral evil—a non-resistant in your soul, which is carried hither and thither on the tide of popular opinion, you know not where.

If national war be ever right, then the Gospel makes no change in the relations of men to those who injure them. It has no higher standard in this respect than the world's standard. It was not intended to make a change in the character of men individually, nor in the national character, in the treatment of enemies. Christians are commanded only to love those who love them, to do good to those who do good to them, to hate those who injure them, to persecute and destroy all who would persecute and destroy them,—"to hold all mankind, in war, enemies, in peace, friends!" Thus Christians stand just where the pagan, the infidel, the savage stand —no higher. There is no new light from the heavens; there is no new fountain opened, the waters of which can heal the diseases of the nations, or purify the world of strife. "What do ye more than others. Do not even the publicans and sinners the same?"

It has been often observed, that our religion is to promote the peace of the world, by taking away the offences which are the causes of war,—by making all men "innocent of blood," so that there shall be no occasion for defensive war;—that if we could but convert the whole world to Christianity the nations would learn war no more for ever. This is true; yet,

but slow progress has been made in these eighteen hundred years of light; slow, for this very reason, that all are waiting for others to become "innocent of blood," first, none having sufficient confidence in their faith to set the example, all holding fast to the sword, which all alike use with the same wanton cruelty, with the same lack of Christian love to their enemies. Very slowly indeed will the heathen be brought in, if you do not send them a Christianity purified of its blood-stains. It is a melancholy truth, that the chief blood-spillers of the world are nominally Christian nations. And it is from these nations that the missions to the heathen are sent. What faith is it that is sent? More swords than Gospels,—and more pagan bodies have been changed from life to death, than pagan souls from the death of idolatry to the spiritual life of Christ. A thousand to one!

Yet we have been told, that we press the cause of Peace too strongly, that we make it too prominent an object, that it interferes with the conversion of the soul. There is a worshipping assembly, a Christian church, on the boundary line between the State of Vermont and the province of Lower Canada. They who are members of it are from both sides of the line,—part citizens of the United States, part subjects of England. They are neighbors, friends; they worship at one altar, they commune together, they live as brethren. Let a war be declared between the United States and England. It breaks up this church; it scatters this flock; Christian sympathy, relationship, mutual kind offices are forgotten. The sanctuary becomes a barrack for soldiers, profane swearing and jesting are heard, instead of the voice of prayer or the psalm of thanksgiving. The members of this church are changed from brethren into enemies; mutual hatred takes the place of Christian love. This vineyard of the Lord is broken up; it is desolate.

Such is the effect on the whole church,—the church universal,—when nations contend in war. The desolation may not be equally apparent, for the local churches may remain. Yet the warfare enters into the very bosom of the church of Christ. It becomes broken and divided. Its members invoke curses, instead of blessings, on each other's heads. They pray for mutual destruction. Thus belligerent and divided, it can present no united front against the sins of the world. It cannot resist the tide of moral evil that is desolating the earth. It cannot contend against intemperance and licentiousness—these are the very fruits of war. It cannot convert the souls of men, for the mad excitements of the battle draw off the mind from the things which pertain to God. It is as musket bearing men that human beings are prized; they are numbered by scores; the value of the individual soul is forgotten. There are no revivals in war. The church cannot send the Gospel to the heathen; cannot extend the cause of the Redeemer any where upon the earth. She cannot even lift up her voice for Peace, for the war is in her very midst. Her holy ground has become the camp of the soldier. There are no Sabbaths in war. The standard of right is overthrown—crimes have become duties, and Christian duties are changed into crimes. It is as if the law of God were repealed!

Can we make Peace too prominent an object? Does its advocacy interfere with the salvation of the soul?

Were the evils of war confined to the carnage of the battle-field, or to the desolations flowing from it over a whole community, its supporters might find some poor plea in its behalf. The conflict, however, is but the breaking forth of the fire which has long burned in secret. It is the seal of God's displeasure—the open manifestation of his wrath for the evil thoughts and the evil dispositions of men. Sin is no act outwardly; it is in the frame of the mind, the bias of the heart. When, therefore, we would look to the measure of war's

guilt, we must not look to the slaughter of the conflict;—its greatest evil is not there—nor is it heard in the groans of the dying, nor in the shriek of the new-made widow, nor in the burst of wailing from the orphan. It is not felt in the pestilence, which slowly and sadly follows the march of the army, lingering over its scenes of blood. The greatest evil of war is not there. The sin lies deeper in man's nature. "It is written with a pen of iron, with the point of a diamond; it is graven on the tablets of the heart and on the horns of your altars." It is in the general abasement of character; in the substitution of the law of force for the law of love; in basing the institutions of man upon selfishness, and not upon the moral nature. It is in the corrupting of Christianity—the veiling of the light of heaven,—the confounding of right and wrong. It is in the teaching that we can "love Corinth and not love the city of God—that we can love our own souls, and not love the children of God." It is in making the party, sectional, and national boundaries, the boundaries of the relations soul with soul. It is in inscribing on the walls of the Gospel temple permission to destroy others for our own good—so that the profane and impious may cry out, "Aha! aha! see how these Christians love one another." If cursed be he who adds or detracts one word from the book of prophecy, let us tremble, if by any act or word by our pens or tongues, we take from our religion its very life, its inner spirit—so that it is without effect on our own souls, and powerless for the conversion of the world.

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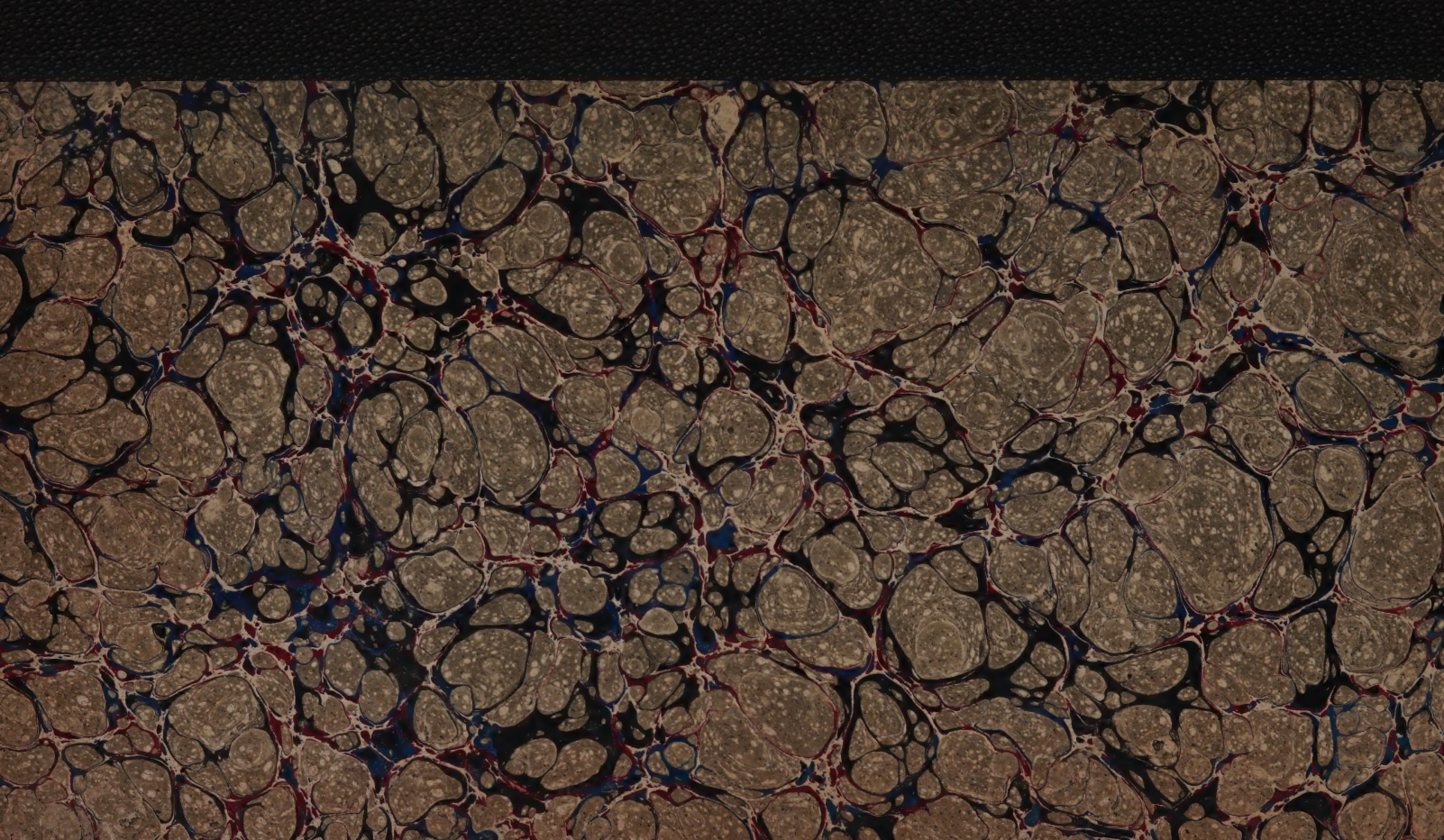
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